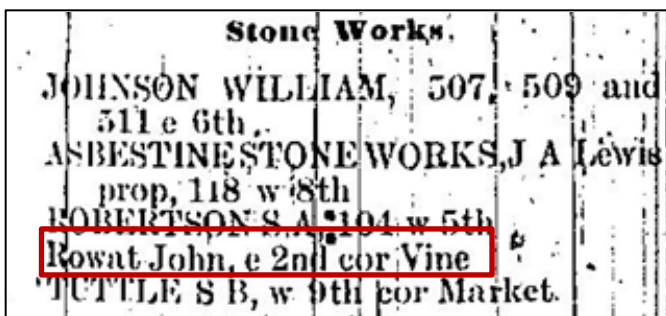


Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the Legislative Session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

According to recent articles in local newspapers, the Rowat Stone Company was established in 1882. In the Des Moines city directories, John Rowat was listed as a stonecutter and contractor between 1882 and 1888. Not until 1888 did the *Des Moines City Directory* include a business listing for Rowat Cut Stone. The 1888 listing placed the business south of Court Avenue on East Second Street at Vine Street.



John Rowat



Business listing for John Rowat in 1888

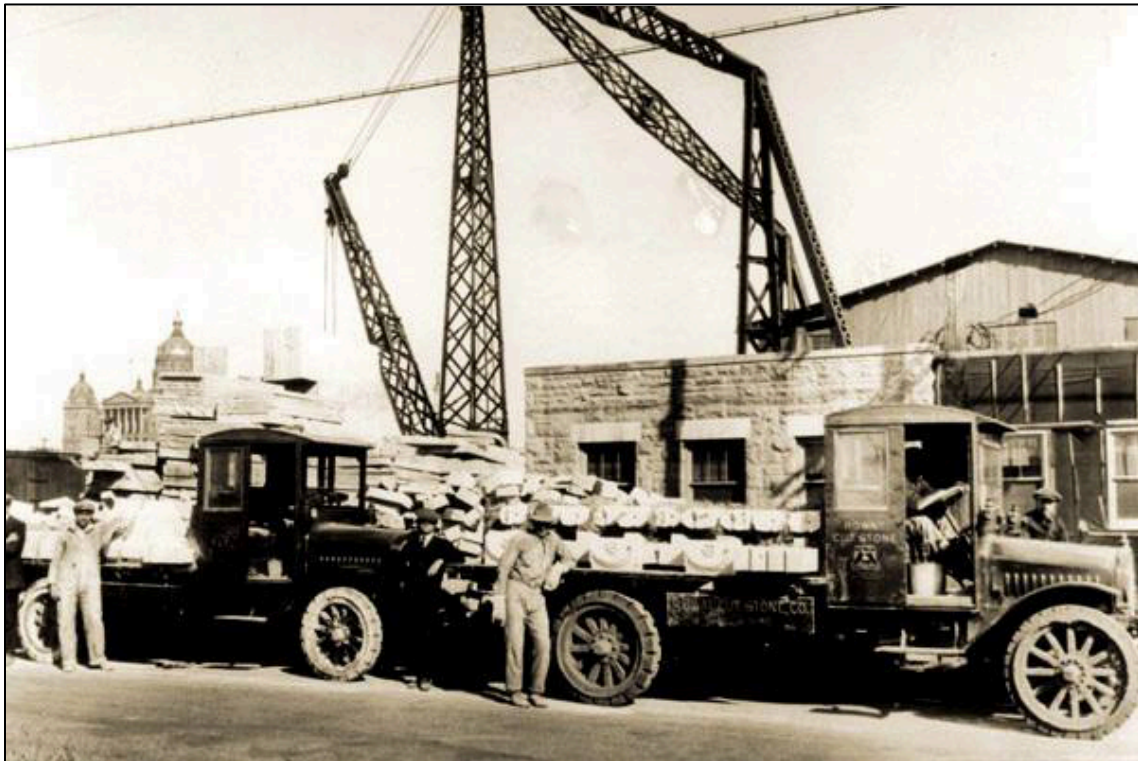


By 1905, the business address was 105 East 6th Street. This would be the corner of East 6th Street and Vine Street.



This is a business listing for the Rowat Cut Stone Company in the 1920 *Des Moines City Directory*.

Notice that Thomas Rowat, John Rowat's son, is listed as manager.



The Rowat Cut Stone Company in the early 1900s



The Rowat Cut Stone Company building front in 2017

Information Provided by the Rowat Family

HISTORY OF THE ROWAT CUT STONE COMPANY

written by

THOMAS W. ROWAT IN 1960.

A history of the Rowat Cut Stone Company should begin many years back. In fact, in 1850 a boy was born into a large family in Kilmarnock, Scotland. This boy started to learn to be a stonecutter at the age of 14 and just after he was 21 years old he left Liverpool, England to come to the United States. This boy was John Rowat, father of Thomas W. Rowat. The craftsmen of those days were quite strong for their Fraternal organizations. John was a stone mason, so he along with two other men had been taking the Masonic degrees and were all given the third degree in Masonry at Liverpool just the day before they sailed for America.

John Rowat went to Chicago when he arrived in America and worked around there for a short time. When he heard that a State Capitol building was being built in Iowa, he came to Des Moines in 1872 and got work as a stone cutter on the Capitol building. In those days they did not seem to be in such a rush as they are now, which shows up in the fact that they spent more than 12 years in building our State Capitol. This job was built before any modern machinery had been introduced in the stone business. Every stone was quarried out for a certain place in the building and brought here by freight and was cut by hand right on the job. All the stone cutting was done by piece work. They were paid so much for top or bottom beds by the square foot and so much for bevels. The whole Capitol building was built by day labor; that is, the legislature would appropriate, perhaps \$400,000 or 800,000, for a two year period to proceed with the building. As soon as the legislature had made the biennial appropriation they would build up the crew on the job and then towards the end of the two year period they would be low on money and the crew would be reduced to a minimum. Then after legislature met and appropriated more money the whole crew would go back to work. At times there were 125 stone cutters working on the job. A Mr. Finkbine was the superintendent in charge of construction and was a wonderfully capable man. There was never even the suggestion of graft at any time during the construction of this building.

After the completion of the Capitol building John Rowat decided to go into the stone business here in Des Moines. Probably the main reason for this decision was that he had married Mary Thomas, a young school teacher about 4 years before that. She had been teaching school in the East Des Moines public schools and taught at Bryant school. Father got a lot of counsel and good advice from his father-in-law John Thomas, a pioneer blacksmith who came to Des Moines in 1859.

From the early records it is amazing to find that the first year John Rowat was in business he used 23 carloads of stone. One of his early entries in his record books represents his beginning... "Bought 2 pinch bars of cast steel \$4.80". This was his first equipment. Lots of his early work consisted of furnishing large pieces of flagstone for sidewalks, most of them being 6" thick. Some other entries are as follows:-

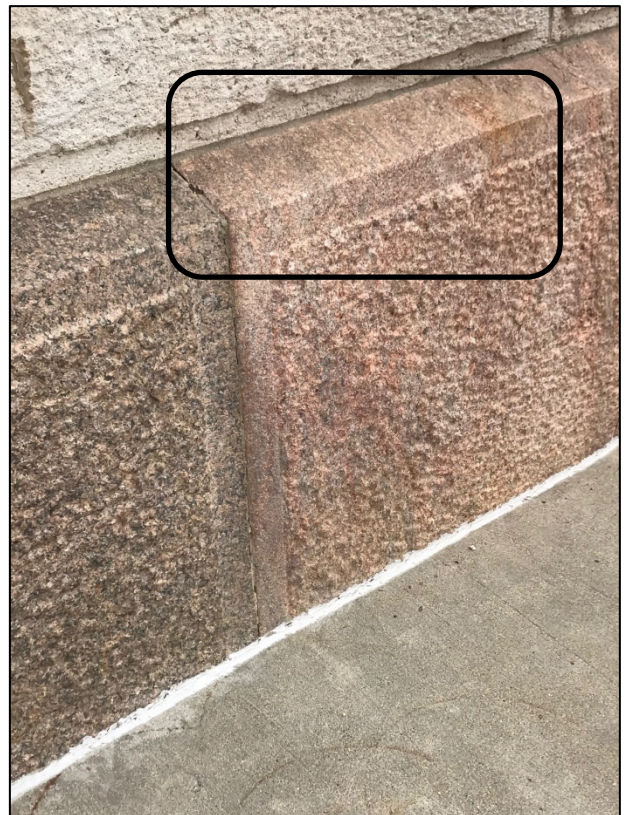
Hauled stone to Dr. Dickinson's on 4th St.	\$10.00
Sand to lay flagstone, 3 loads @ 60 cts.	1.80
Paid cash to help lay flagstone	8.70
Paid cash to help unload car of stone	1.50
Paid freight on car of stone from Joliet	35.00

There is no question from the records that John Rowat did quite a thriving business right from the time his business started in 1882.



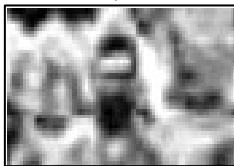
The picture above was provided by the Rowat family. It reportedly shows some of the men who helped construct the Iowa State Capitol. The arrow points to John Rowat. Although this photograph cannot be verified with the Capitol records currently available, there were many small wooden structures built around the Capitol at the time of its construction, and the stone shown in the photo closely resembles the granite used in the base course around the entire Capitol, as seen in the photo to the right.

[The Rowat Stone Company History](#)





The Capitol construction crew



**Could this be
John Rowat?**



**John Rowat
photo from
previous page**

This is a picture of the workers during the construction of the Iowa State Capitol. No information exists as to what type of laborers these men were or if one of them was John Rowat.

The family information states that Rowat arrived in Des Moines in 1872; however, he is not listed in the city directory until 1877. The family information also relates that it took 12 years to build the Capitol. It actually took 15 years (1871-1886). The Capitol Commissioners' reports of 1874-1875 verify the process of cutting the stone for the stonecutters working on the Capitol.

The organization of the working force on the capitol building, under the direction of the overseer of construction and his assistant, who by direction of the commissioners, have the general charge and supervision of the work, is as follows:

There are two general foremen, one of whom, Mr. James R. Crawshaw, has charge of the iron and wood work, centering, and patterns;

the other, Mr. N. W. Smith, has charge of the general labor, derricks, all derrick work, stone masonry, and concreting. The brick-work is under the supervision of Mr. John C. Lefler. All work done under the above named foremen is by the day. The stone-cutting is done by the superficial foot, at a price, in accordance with the work done, ranging from \$1.50 to \$0.07 per square foot. The workman is furnished with a ticket for each stone, on which is an isometrical drawing of the stone as it will be when cut, with all necessary written directions, the exact size of each dimension, and number of pattern, where a pattern is to be used. This work is under the charge of Messrs. William and Thomas Brunton.

I take pleasure in stating to the commissioners that the character of the work done, under the direction of the above named gentlemen, is ample evidence of their skill and ability in their departments. Statements are hereto attached showing the amount and kinds of material received, the amount and kinds of work done, and the cost of tools and machinery purchased.

Respectfully submitted,
R. S. FINKBINE,
Overseer of Construction.

